

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Gerald of Wales and Competing Interpretations of the Welsh Middle Ages c. 1870-1910

Journal Item

How to cite:

Marsden, Richard (2011). Gerald of Wales and Competing Interpretations of the Welsh Middle Ages c. 1870-1910. *Welsh History Review*, 25(3) pp. 314-345.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2011 Unknown



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/uwp/whis/2011/00000025/00000003/art00002>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

GERALD OF WALES AND COMPETING INTERPRETATIONS OF THE WELSH MIDDLE AGES, c.1860–1910*

The closing decades of the nineteenth century saw a shift in how Welsh medieval history was conceptualized. Predominantly antiquarian and mythic approaches were replaced, in intellectual circles at least, with narrative syntheses based on credible sources. This change was part of the rise of source-based and narrative forms of national history-writing across Europe.¹ The result in England was a confidently Whiggish and constitutionally focused historiography that reduced Welsh history to what Keith Robbins calls ‘little more than a perpetual footnote in accounts of the history of the English state’.² Welsh historians in the period responded to this discourse in a variety of ways, but even those who disputed its message nonetheless borrowed extensively from its assumptions.

Given that a critical approach to sources was central to this new ‘scientific’ history, its impact on Welsh historiography can be explored by looking at how English and Welsh historians employed one particular source. To that end, this article will focus on their use of the *Description of Wales* (*Descriptio Kambriae*) by the churchman, Gerald of Wales (c.1146–1223). This text was not only a valuable source of information on medieval Welsh society but, for reasons discussed below, worked as a metaphorical barometer for the outlooks of the historians who used it. An analysis of how the source was applied thereby illustrates how the conceptual tools of English Whiggism were appropriated by Welsh intellectuals at the close of the nineteenth century and deployed in

* Thanks are due to Dr Helen Barlow, Gideon Brough, Chris Dennis, Dr Ben Earl, Dr Matthew Griffiths, Professor Huw Pryce and Dr Dave Wyatt for providing feedback on this article, and to my father, Andrew Marsden, for proofreading it.

¹ A. D. Carr, *Medieval Wales* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 12–13; P. J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, NJ, 2002), pp. 15–17.

² Keith Robbins, ‘More than a footnote? Wales in British history’, *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 1 (2001), 21.

support of a growing cultural and political nationalism. Huw Pryce has already used the issue of the Normans in Wales to show that the treatment of a particular topic by historians can highlight changing attitudes towards Welsh identity.³ This article uses a specific source, rather than a specific theme, to contribute to that research.

GERALD OF WALES AND THE *DESCRIPTION OF WALES*

In order to understand the uses to which historians have put the *Description*, it is necessary to recognize the influences that shaped both the source and its writer. The first version of the text was completed in 1194 as a companion piece to the *Journey through Wales* (*Itinerarium Cambriae*), a travelogue written by Gerald as he toured Wales in 1188 with Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury to preach the Third Crusade.⁴ The *Description* focuses on the topography and ethnography of Wales, with a particular emphasis on those areas in the south still under native rule. Book One covers the geography and place names of Wales, its political and ecclesiastical divisions, the genealogies of ruling elites and the positive aspects of Welsh character. Book Two, subtitled ‘the less good points’, focuses mainly on what Gerald regarded as the more reprehensible aspects of Welsh culture.⁵ The *Description*’s value to subsequent historians derives from the fact that it is not a set of annals or a narrative, but what Robert Bartlett calls an ‘ethnographic monologue’ aiming to describe a society.⁶ It therefore contains a wealth of information about Welsh life in the twelfth century that is not found in any other contemporary source.

Gerald’s portrayal of Welsh society was shaped by his background. As a member of a prominent Marcher family and thus the Norman knightly class in west Wales, he shared cultural territory with the intellectual and

³ Huw Pryce, ‘The Normans in Welsh history (R. Allen Brown Memoiral lecture)’, in C. P. Lewis (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Studies*, XXX (2007), pp. 1–18.

⁴ Lewis Thorpe (ed. and trans.), *The Journey through Wales / The Description of Wales* (London, 1978), pp. 24–9, 46, 49–50; two subsequent versions were completed in the early years of the thirteenth century.

⁵ *Description*, pp. 218–19; James F. Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI: Itinerarium Cambriae et Descriptio Cambriae* (Rolls Series, 21; London, 1868), pp. 159–60.

⁶ Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales: A Voice of the Middle Ages* (Stroud, 2006), p. 148. (Originally published as idem, *Gerald of Wales 1146–1223* (Oxford, 1982).)

political elites of England.⁷ His view of the Welsh was consequently coloured by common assumptions of Anglo-French superiority. In comparison with an England that was seen by its own literati as urbanized, agrarian, politically centralized, lawful and, therefore, civilized, the Welsh were perceived as rural, pastoral, politically fragmented, lawless and, therefore, barbarous.⁸ Moreover, Gerald had been educated for the church from a young age, first with his uncle Bishop David fitz Gerald, at St Davids, then at the abbey of St Peter at Gloucester, which was closely connected with the prestigious Norman house of Mont Saint-Michel, and finally in the ecclesiastical schools of Paris.⁹ As a result he was infused with the reform agenda that had dominated the Western church since the previous century. That ideology revolved around the moral reform of the church and the societies that it represented. This meant that the inheritance of clerical offices, clerical marriage and clerical concubinage, all of which were common in twelfth-century Wales, were repugnant to the reformers.¹⁰ Furthermore, while reformers sought to exercise ecclesiastical control over sexual relations in secular society through the institution of marriage, direct access to sexual power by lay elites was an important part of the social fabric in 'unreformed' societies such as twelfth-century Wales. This meant that cohabitation before marriage, concubinage and marriage within degrees of consanguinity that were condemned by ecclesiastical reformers were not only common in Wales but were in line with traditional social and moral norms. To reformers like Gerald, however, such practices were anathema.¹¹

⁷ Huw Pryce, 'A cross-border career: Giraldus Cambrensis between Wales and England', in Reinhard Schneider (ed.), *Grenzgänger* (Saarbrücken, 1998), pp. 46–8; Huw Pryce, 'In search of a medieval society: Deheubarth in the writings of Gerald of Wales', ante, 13 (1986–7), 267; Robert Bartlett, 'Gerald of Wales (c.1146–1220x23)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10769>, accessed 9 July 2009.

⁸ This has been discussed by many historians, of whom the following are perhaps the most notable: R. R. Davies, 'English synopsis; the manners and morals of the Welsh', ante, 12 (1984–5), 175–8; idem, *Domination and Conquest: The Experience of Ireland, Scotland and Wales 1100–1300* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 21–3; John Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 3–18, 41–58; Bartlett, *Voice of the Middle Ages*, pp. 21–2.

⁹ Pryce, 'Cross-border career', pp. 47–8.

¹⁰ Bartlett, *Voice of the Middle Ages*, pp. 31–53.

¹¹ David Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland 800–1200* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 265–70; Davies, 'Manners and morals', pp. 175–6.

On the other hand, Gerald's insights into Welsh society were also influenced by his familial links, through his maternal grandmother, with the royal family of Deheubarth.¹² He was thus the product not only of a settler society but was also connected to the top echelons of the region's native elite. This placed him in an ambiguous cultural position and also encouraged the interest in and sympathy for Welsh society that is quite clearly communicated in the *Description*. Indeed, this dual descent created problems for Gerald in both England and native-ruled Wales: neither society fully trusted him and he was to an extent an outsider in both.¹³ This issue is further complicated by present-day problems of ethnic nomenclature. Terms such as 'Anglo-Norman' and 'Cambro-Norman', common parlance today, are modern constructions and were never used during the Middle Ages.¹⁴ Yet while Gerald's Marcher kinsmen were feudally associated with England, which was itself still in the process of constructing a workable sense of identity following the Norman Conquest, Marcher society also saw itself as culturally distinct from the Normans, French, English and Welsh. Indeed, Gerald may have regarded himself as English but he also saw Wales as his home.¹⁵ To add to the confusion, his first language was most likely English, but he learned French as a member of the knightly class and Latin as a churchman. In addition, he was familiar with a number of Welsh terms, although he was unlikely to have spoken the language fluently.¹⁶

The key point here is that Gerald's cultural and, to use an anachronistic term, national allegiances were extremely complex and hard to pin down. As Pryce points out, Gerald led a 'cross-border career', which to an extent transcended ethnic boundaries and allowed him to inhabit the cultural orbits of England, native Wales and the Welsh March

¹² Pryce, 'Cross-border career', p. 46.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁴ John Gillingham, 'Normanizing the English invaders of Ireland', in Huw Pryce and John Watts (eds), *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages: Essays in Memory of Rees Davies* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 85–97. Moreover, there was not even a fully settled terminology to describe Welsh ethnicity in the twelfth century: Huw Pryce, 'British or Welsh? National identity in twelfth-century Wales', *English Historical Review*, 116 (2001), 775–801; Bartlett, *Voice of the Middle Ages*, pp. 22–4.

¹⁵ Hugh M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation and Identity 1066–c. 1220* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 77–80; Bartlett, *Voice of the Middle Ages*, pp. 2–5; Pryce, 'Cross-border career', pp. 52–3.

¹⁶ Bartlett, *Voice of the Middle Ages*, p. 19; Michael Richter, *Giraldus Cambrensis: The Growth of the Welsh Nation* (Aberystwyth, 1972), pp. 71–4.

simultaneously.¹⁷ As a historical figure, and as the author of several heavily used primary sources, he was in this way imbued with an ambiguity that proved very useful to the historians who utilized his work. Indeed, this led to extensive debate in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries over whether he was a Norman, an Englishman or a Welshman.¹⁸ As a result, both English and Welsh scholars could claim him as their own and use that as a starting point for their competing interpretations of medieval Welsh life.

Gerald's attitudes towards England and Wales altered as his career progressed.¹⁹ However, when the first version of the *Description* was written he was working as a clerk at the English royal court and, as archdeacon of Brecon, part of an ecclesiastical hierarchy that was ultimately subject to the authority of Canterbury. The text was therefore created from a more English perspective than some of his later works, and was written specifically for an English and continental audience.²⁰ Given this agenda, and the widespread assumptions about Welsh secular and religious barbarism discussed above, it is not surprising that much of Gerald's portrayal of the Welsh was negative. In Book Two of the *Description* he listed a range of sins that offended his reform sensibilities, including the marriage of cousins, cohabitation before marriage, concubinage and homosexuality.²¹ He cited a tendency towards perjury and oath-breaking, and criticized the Welsh church for the endemic inheritance of church benefices and clerical offices.²² In addition, he depicted the Welsh as thieving, avaricious for goods and land, cowardly, and gluttonous like animals.²³ He also noted the pastoralism of Welsh life, in contrast to the urbanized and agrarian economy of England, and stated that the Welsh did not live in towns but 'lead a solitary existence, deep in the woods'.²⁴ Towards the end of the text he described what he perceived as the endemic violence and political instability of Welsh society:

¹⁷ Pryce, 'Cross-border career', pp. 59–60.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 51–2; Bartlett, *Voice of the Middle Ages*, pp. 16–17.

¹⁹ Pryce, 'Cross-border career', p. 52.

²⁰ Pryce, 'Medieval society', 280–1; Bartlett, 'Gerald of Wales'.

²¹ *Description*, pp. 262–5; *Descriptio Kambriae*, pp. 213–6; Gerald states that the 'vice' of homosexuality died out amongst the Welsh long ago: *Description*, pp. 264–5; *Descriptio Kambriae*, pp. 215–16.

²² *Description*, pp. 256, 263–4; *Descriptio Kambriae*, pp. 206–7, 214–15.

²³ *Description*, pp. 257–62; *Descriptio Kambriae*, pp. 207–13.

²⁴ *Description*, pp. 233, 251–2; *Descriptio Kambriae*, pp. 179–80, 200–1.

There are three things which are causing the ruin of the Welsh people and preventing them, generation after generation, from ever enjoying prosperity. The first is that all of their sons, both legitimate and illegitimate, insist upon taking equal shares in their patrimony. One result of this . . . is that they not infrequently kill each other. The second is that they entrust the upbringing of their sons to important people of good family in the neighbourhood. When the fathers die, each foster-parent does all in his power to ensure the succession of his protégé, which leads to murder, arson and wholesale destruction. Thirdly, through their natural pride and obstinacy, they will not order themselves as other nations do so successfully, but refuse to accept the rule and dominion of one single king.²⁵

Again the implicit contrast here was with England. To Gerald, the Welsh tradition of partible inheritance (*cyfran*) was a major cause of internecine strife and lawlessness, whereas the practice of primogeniture in England minimized such conflict. Similarly, he saw monarchical centralization as a route to social stability and prosperity, as opposed to the instability of the competing kingdoms of native Wales. In this vein, Gerald advised the Welsh to take a single leader in order to resist encroachment from England.²⁶ Furthermore, in the first version of the *Description* he asserted that the Welsh were 'virtually ungovernable' and, because of that, suggested that the entire region be turned into a 'game preserve'.²⁷

Taking this depiction at face value, the *Description* can be read as part of a group of twelfth-century English sources which portray the Welsh in pejorative terms. These sources, which include the works of ecclesiastical writers such as William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, William of Newburgh, Ralph Diceto and Roger of Howden, were symptomatic of a process of national redefinition in England following the Norman Conquest. These reform-influenced writers shared Gerald's view of the Welsh as politically unstable, violent, pastoral and not properly Christian. They articulated this view by appropriating the concept of the barbarian from classical literature and applying it to the Welsh, and also to the

²⁵ *Description*, p. 273; *Descriptio Kambriae*, p. 225. While Thorpe's translation sometimes takes liberties with Gerald's text, it conveys the substance of the Latin and is therefore acceptable for the purposes of this discussion.

²⁶ *Description*, pp. 273–4; *Descriptio Kambriae*, pp. 226–7.

²⁷ This section was removed from later versions of the text: *Description*, p. 52; *Descriptio Kambriae*, p. 225, n. 4.

Scots and the Irish. This process cast those peoples as semi-pagan and inferior next to an advanced and 'reformed' England, and was part of an effort to define a new post-conquest English identity in opposition to the other societies of Britain.²⁸

As a continentally educated churchman, Gerald was probably aware of at least fragments of the classical writings in which the concept of the barbarian was originally deployed.²⁹ Moreover, the attitudes encapsulated in Book Two of the *Description* certainly fit the mould of the Christian barbarian created by other twelfth-century English writers, and Gerald even used the term 'barbarous' at one point in the text.³⁰ Yet Gerald was not like any of the writers listed above. He was not an English cleric per se, but rather a Marcher with an international education and a Welsh lineage that overshadowed his Norman ancestry in terms of prestige. This is reflected in the praise for the Welsh in Book One of the *Description*. Here Gerald lauded their courage, hardiness, martial traditions and ability to win battles despite being lightly armed. He emphasized their generosity and the extent of their hospitality to strangers, stating that there were no beggars in Wales.³¹ In addition, he asserted that the Welsh were intelligent, gifted at public speaking, debate and wordplay, and that they refused to be cowed in the presence of social superiors; he also praised them for their poetic and musical abilities.³² Gerald then described a long Christian tradition in Wales and emphasized the piety of the people.³³ It is also significant that Welsh pastoralism was discussed not in Book Two but rather in Book One, which implies that Gerald perceived it less negatively than tended to be the case among English writers.

Gerald undeniably passed judgement on Welsh life and found it wanting in many respects. This attitude was shared by his English contemporaries and helped to create a civilizing dynamic in relations between England and Wales.³⁴ Yet the *Description* was also a judicious

²⁸ Gillingham, *English in the Twelfth Century*, pp. 3–18, 69–91, 93–109, 123–42; Bartlett, *Voice of the Middle Ages*, pp. 131–46; Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors*, pp. 351–4; Davies, 'Manners and morals', 174–8.

²⁹ Bartlett, *Voice of the Middle Ages*, p. 148; Gillingham, *English in the Twelfth Century*, p. 18.

³⁰ *Description*, p. 271; *Descriptio Kambriae*, p. 223.

³¹ *Description*, pp. 236–7; *Descriptio Kambriae*, pp. 182–4.

³² *Description*, pp. 239–43; *Descriptio Kambriae*, pp. 186–91.

³³ *Description*, pp. 253–4; *Descriptio Kambriae*, pp. 202–4.

³⁴ Gillingham, *English in the Twelfth Century*, pp. 41–58; Davies, *Domination and Conquest*, pp. 22–3; Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors*, pp. 356–67.

balancing act in which he was at pains to neither slander nor whitewash, but to present a balanced view of Welsh life. The last three chapters, detailing not only how England could conquer Wales but also how the Welsh could best resist, demonstrated this.³⁵ That balance lent the source the potential for an ideological malleability in the hands of later historians. It was this malleability, coupled with the wealth of information that the source contains and the convenient complexity of its author's background, that made the *Description* such an effective barometer for views of the medieval Welsh between 1860 and 1910.

ENGLISH HISTORIANS AND HISTORICAL PROGRESS

As is shown below, Welsh historiography in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was heavily influenced by English approaches to history writing. Consequently, it is necessary to understand how Gerald's *Description* was used by English historians before examining how Welsh scholars interpreted the source. It is therefore significant that the view advanced by the influential historian John Richard Green (1837–83) was in many ways strikingly similar to that put forward by Gerald 700 years earlier. Green was an Anglican churchman and independent historian, but had been educated at Oxford and maintained close links with leading historians there.³⁶ His widely read *Short History of the English People* (1874) was an academic yet intentionally populist work. It thus represented a scholarly view that was intended to appeal to, and perhaps to some extent reflect, popular opinion. As an undergraduate Green attended Jesus College, which had an almost entirely Welsh student body at the time. Despite developing some significant friendships with his Welsh fellows, this experience led him to develop a critical view of Welsh culture that infected his attitude to towards Welsh history.³⁷ Touching briefly on medieval Wales in the *Short History*, Green asserted:

³⁵ *Description*, pp. 267–74; *Descriptio Kambriae*, pp. 218–27; for a detailed analysis of the *Description* and the attitudes that informed it see Bartlett, *Voice of the Middle Ages*, pp. 147–71.

³⁶ Anthony Brundage, *The People's Historian: John Richard Green and the Writing of History in Victorian England* (Westport, CT, 1994); Rosemary Jann, *The Art and Science of Victorian History* (Columbus, OH, 1985), pp. 141–3.

³⁷ Brundage, *People's Historian*, pp. 15, 22–4; James Campbell, *Stubbs and the English State: The Stenton Lecture 1987* (Reading, 1989), p. 9.

To all outer seeming Wales had in the thirteenth century become utterly barbarous. Stripped of every vestige of the older Roman civilization by ages of bitter warfare, of civil strife, of estrangement from the general culture of Christendom, the unconquered Britons had sunk into a mass of savage herdsmen, clad in the skins and fed by the milk of the cattle they tended, faithless, greedy, and revengeful, retaining no higher political organization than that of the clan, broken by ruthless feuds, united only in battle or in raid against the stranger.³⁸

Here Green depicted the Welsh as utterly uncivilized: they engaged in frequent internecine warfare, they were not properly Christian, they were predominantly pastoral and they were politically divided. In this way he levelled the same charges as Gerald and also many twelfth-century English writers. Green then went on to outline what he saw as the beneficial effects of the Edwardian Conquest of 1282, describing in positive terms how Edward I introduced trade guilds, the shire system and English laws, and abolished 'the more barbarous of the Welsh customs'.³⁹ He thus presented English rule as a remedy to the supposed political, legal and economic failures of Wales. Indeed, it is significant that a similar line was taken even by English historians, such as Thomas Frederick Tout (1855–1929), who had an interest in and sympathy for medieval Welsh history.⁴⁰

Green made it clear that Gerald's *Description* provided the basis for his portrayal of Welsh society prior to the Edwardian Conquest.⁴¹ Yet he also listed Gerald among the 'chief sources' for the reign of Henry II and called him 'the father of our popular literature'.⁴² In this way Green

³⁸ John Richard Green, *A Short History of the English People*, I ([1874] London, 1960), p. 150.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁴⁰ For Tout's discussion of the civilizing influence of the Edwardian Conquest, see T. F. Tout, *Edward the First* (London, 1893), p. 117; for his sympathetic view of Welsh history see, for example, *idem*, 'Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, called Llywelyn the Great (d 1240), prince of North Wales, afterwards prince of Wales', *Dictionary of National Biography* (1893), at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/olddnb/16874>, accessed 25 July 2010; *idem*, 'A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest. In two volumes. By John Edward Lloyd, M.A., Professor of History in the University College of North Wales, Bangor (London: Longmans, 1911.)', *English Historical Review*, 27 (1912), 131–5.

⁴¹ Green, *Short History*, p. 150.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 97, 112; Brundage, *People's Historian*, p. 85.

appropriated Gerald (and his *Description*) into an English historiographical canon, minimizing his Welsh links and positioning him as an informed but external observer able to articulate the many faults to be found in contemporary Welsh society. Moreover, the fact that the negative portrayal quoted above was placed at the start of a chapter on the Edwardian Conquest made it an implicit yet powerful justification of that event. Green's reliance on the *Description* is further emphasized by the fact that, when his condemnation of the Welsh appeared in extended form in the enlarged *History of the English People* (1877–80), it was immediately followed by a direct quotation from the *Description*.⁴³ However, in that instance Gerald's words were used to praise Welsh literature and music, rather than denigrate Welsh society. Given that one of Green's main preoccupations was with cultural and literary history, this acclaim for the creative endeavours of the medieval Welsh is not surprising.⁴⁴ Indeed, influential writers such as Matthew Arnold had already contributed to a 'Celtic' stereotype which highlighted the supposed creative and imaginative faculties of the Welsh, Irish and Highland Scots, and contrasted these with the more practical virtues commonly associated with English ethnicity.⁴⁵ These ideas not only fed into the Whig historiography discussed below, but also resonated in the ways in which Welsh historians used the *Description*, as demonstrated in the later sections of this discussion.

Green's pejorative view of the Welsh Middle Ages was not just a personal response to his undergraduate days, but was symptomatic of much broader intellectual attitudes. Another telling example can be found in Henry William Carless Davis's *England under the Normans and Angevins* (1905), produced thirty years after Green's *Short History*. Davis (1874–1928) was an influential Oxford medievalist and his work provided a powerful example of the durability of a negative interpretation of the Welsh medieval past.⁴⁶ He asserted:

⁴³ John Richard Green, *History of the English People*, I ([1877] New York, 1899), pp. 359–60.

⁴⁴ Jann, *Art and Science*, pp. 153–4; Brundage, *People's Historian*, pp. 1–3.

⁴⁵ Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London, 1867); Murray G. H. Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 64–5; Malcolm Chapman, *The Celts: The Construction of a Myth* (London, 1992), pp. 215–17.

⁴⁶ J. H. R. Weaver, rev. H. C. G. Matthew, 'Davis, Henry William Carless (1874–1928), historian', *ODNB*, at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32746>, accessed 15 July 2009.

the country, as described by Gerald de Barri about 1189, was a congeries of petty states, formed in one generation to be disintegrated in the next. Their patriotism was only shown by the tenacity with which, in the midst of civil wars, they defied the English Marchers. Prince strove with prince and family with family; it was rarely that men of condition disgraced their birth by dying in their beds. The Welshman of the twelfth century showed no trace of political capacity. For good or evil the slave of his impulses, he prayed with the passion of a fanatic and fought with the fury of a madman. The most genial of companions, oriental in his ideas of hospitality, and honourable according to his code, he was still unfitted by temper and education for a settled life. Though dependent upon foreign trade for the commonest necessities, he cherished a profound contempt for manual arts and industry. By preference he remained a herdsman; in his heart of hearts he was a nomad. He lived with his family in solitude, upon the edge of a forest or a mountain-slope. His house was little better than a hut, flimsily constructed of timber, mud and wattle, and needing to be renewed from year to year.⁴⁷

Here Davis highlighted the same traits in the twelfth-century Welsh as Green and, as the quotation explicitly stated, his portrayal was similarly based on Gerald's testimony. Davis described a decentralized and unstable political system, a background of habitual violence, and an economically retarded pastoral existence. Moreover, his use of the term 'oriental' invoked a value-laden differentiation between Europe and Asia in which Wales was cast in the subordinate non-European role. Yet there were also hints of praise for Welsh hospitality, honour and religious devotion, and intimations of a kind of picturesque savagery. Like Green's admiration for Welsh music and literature, these positive allusions were also drawn from the *Description*. Moreover, they invoked some of the common assumptions about 'Celtic' character mentioned above, and the idea of the noble savage which is discussed in the closing sections of this article.

For Green and Davis, Gerald's *Description* was a resource through which medieval Wales could be portrayed as less civilized than England. This provided an implicit and retrospective justification for the English conquest of Wales. While their accounts do include some of the positive

⁴⁷ H. W. C. Davis, *England under the Normans and Angevins 1066–1272* ([1905] 12th edn, London, 1945), pp. 446–7.

points that Gerald made, these are marginalized in favour of a predominantly critical interpretation. There was thus clear synchronicity between the depictions recorded by Gerald in the twelfth century and those put forward by Green and Davis in the later nineteenth and early twentieth. In addition, the classical literature on which the medieval idea of Christian barbarians was based was also central to the education that Green and later Davis received at Oxford.⁴⁸ This provided another point of conceptual contact between Gerald and the later historians who relied on his writings.

The correlation in attitudes between the two periods is powerfully illustrated by the 1847 *Report into the State of Education in Wales* (or the 'Treachery of the Blue Books', as the three volumes of the report became known in Wales).⁴⁹ This report presented the people of Wales as lawless, lazy, unhygienic, ignorant and immoral.⁵⁰ The fact that it was commissioned by the British state made it a stark indication of official attitudes towards Wales in the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, the report contributed to the construction of new 'Celtic' forms of long-standing stereotypes relating to the Welsh and to the non-English peoples of Britain more generally.⁵¹ Much of the blame for these alleged qualities was apportioned to the Welsh language, which was not a factor in Gerald's analysis seven centuries earlier.⁵² However, the report's view of religion in Wales was strongly reminiscent of that put forward in the *Description*. As already noted, for the reform-minded Gerald, the unreformed nature of the Welsh church and society was closely associated with the perceived backwardness of the Welsh people's lifestyle. The 1847 report encapsulated very similar sentiments about the

⁴⁸ Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquaries, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England 1838–1886* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 137–9; Reba N. Soffer, *Discipline and Power: The University, History, and the Making of an English Elite, 1870–1930* (Stanford, CA, 1994), pp. 10–30.

⁴⁹ For the origins of this nickname, see Prys Morgan, 'From long knives to blue books', in R. R. Davies, R. A. Griffiths, I. G. Jones and K. O. Morgan (eds), *Welsh Society and Nationhood: Historical Essays Presented to Glanmor Williams* (Cardiff, 1984), pp. 199–215.

⁵⁰ Morgan, 'Long knives', p. 208; Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, *The Language of the Blue Books: The Perfect Instrument of Empire* (Cardiff, 1998), pp. 129–80.

⁵¹ Pittock, *Celtic Identity*, pp. 117–18; Roberts, *Language of the Blue Books*, pp. 223–32.

⁵² Roberts, *Language of the Blue Books*, pp. 192–205; Morgan, 'Long knives', pp. 204–7.

relationship between Anglicanism and the nonconformism that was becoming increasingly widespread in Wales. In both cases the religion of England was depicted as more advanced and more theologically correct, while the religion of Wales was assumed to be at the heart of Welsh failings and not properly Christian to boot. This would have been as disturbing for Green, as an Anglican churchman, as it had been for Gerald. Furthermore, the report was commissioned specifically to provide a basis for the reform of education in Wales along anglicizing lines, and many sections were particularly damning of nonconformist schools.⁵³ This is evidence of a religiously based civilizing dynamic similar to that found in the relationship between England and Wales during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In both periods English commentators felt that the Welsh needed English guidance before they could reap the benefits of civilization. The nineteenth-century assumption that Anglican education was best for Wales resonates with Gerald's twelfth-century statement in the *Description* that the Welsh were 'blessed, and blessed again, if only they had good prelates and pastors'.⁵⁴

Furthermore, in both periods these religious attitudes were accompanied by an assumption of the superiority of the English political system. As already illustrated, Gerald admired the stability and sophistication of English government and the political instability of Wales suffered through comparison. Green and Davis operated in a similar ideological context. In the late nineteenth century, English historians wrote predominantly within a Whig canon that made the development of the British constitution the central theme of English history. Whig historians believed that the Anglo-British parliamentary system represented the perfect balance between personal liberty and social order. This glorification of the state in the present was projected backwards into the past as historians sought to trace the medieval origins of the institutions that they held in such reverence.⁵⁵ Viewed in this light, the Welsh medieval past presented only a story of constitutional failure.

⁵³ Roberts, *Language of the Blue Books*, pp. 168–79; Morgan, 'Long knives', p. 208.

⁵⁴ *Description*, p. 254; *Descriptio Cambriae*, p. 204.

⁵⁵ J. W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 36–60; Michael Bentley, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction* (Abingdon, 1999), pp. 62–70; Benedikt Stuchtey, 'Literature, liberty and the life of the nation: British historiography from Macaulay to Trevelyan', in Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan and Kevin Passmore (eds), *Writing National Histories: Western Europe since 1800* (London, 1999), pp. 30–46.

Green and, to a lesser extent, Davis were located within this Whig canon. Davis, though dubious about the traditional Whig milestones of Magna Carta (1215) and the Provisions of Oxford (1258), nevertheless praised Simon de Montfort for his pursuit of the 'ideal' of parliament.⁵⁶ Green, meanwhile, extrapolated a direct connection between parliament and the village moots of the Anglo-Saxon period.⁵⁷ This view was symptomatic of Teutonism, an ideology that accorded the Anglo-Saxons an inherent love of liberty which had helped England to reach what was, in Whiggish eyes, its current happy state.⁵⁸ Moreover, those Anglo-Saxons were held to be the direct forbears of the modern English. The Scots, the Irish and the Welsh were used as a foil against which to praise this Anglo-Saxon heritage. This created a conceptual relationship between 'Celts' and Saxons in oppositional terms that defined the former, often negatively, through their 'differentness' from the latter.⁵⁹ In the case of the Welsh, this process can be seen at work in the 1847 report and in the quotations given above from the works of Green and Davis.⁶⁰

This outlook was reminiscent of the kind of identity-building through opposition that was a feature of English intellectualism in the twelfth-century, and into which Gerald's work can superficially, if erroneously, be slotted. It was in part this similarity that enabled Green and Davis to sidestep the complex issues of Gerald's national identity and instead appropriate his work into an English literary tradition that was critical of Welsh life. In fact, the view that Gerald's work, if not the man himself,

⁵⁶ Davis, *Normans and Angevins*, pp. 376, 450–1, 478–9; for Whig views of Magna Carta, see Bentley, *Modern Historiography*, pp. 62–3; Stuchtey, 'Literature, liberty and the life of the nation', pp. 31–2, 38–9.

⁵⁷ Green, *Short History*, pp. 3–4; Jann, *Art and Science*, p. 149; Brundage, *People's Historian*, pp. 146–7.

⁵⁸ R. J. Smith, *The Gothic Bequest: Medieval Institutions in British Thought, 1688–1863* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 98–103, 140–6; Campbell, *Stubbs and the English State*, pp. 4–6.

⁵⁹ Chapman, *Celts*, pp. 208–10; Pittock, *Celtic Identity*, pp. 20–60; Campbell, *Stubbs and the English State*, p. 9.

⁶⁰ This Whiggish emphasis on constitution and race also had a powerful impact on the historiography of Scotland in the period, and was actually in large part the product of intellectual developments within lowland Scotland in the previous century: Murray G. H. Pittock, 'Enlightenment historiography and its legacy; plurality, authority and power', in Helen Brocklehurst and Robert Phillips (eds), *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 33–44; Michael Fry, 'The Whig interpretation of Scottish history', in Ian Donnachie and Christopher A. Whatley (eds), *The Manufacture of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1992), pp. 72–89.

was essentially English in character was already widespread before Davis or even Green began their historical labours. The literary writer George Craik included Gerald's writings in his *History of English Literature* (1861), as did the critic Henry Morley in his *English Writers: An Attempt towards a History of English Literature* (1867).⁶¹ Similarly, at least two American scholars in the period listed him in the same breath as more unambiguously English writers such as William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris.⁶² Meanwhile, in his *History of England* (1856–62) the publisher Charles Knight portrayed Gerald as an external observer on his 1188 preaching tour of Wales, and accepted the pejorative aspects of his description of the Welsh at face value.⁶³

It was perhaps because of this tendency to view Gerald as an English writer that his works were accorded no less than eight volumes of the prestigious Rolls Series. These were published between 1861 and 1891, with the *Description* and the *Journey* appearing in volume six in 1868. The aim of the Rolls Series was to set historical research on a sound basis by publishing scholarly printed versions of manuscript sources. The inclusion of Gerald's works on Wales was thus another example of the transformation of Welsh historical study under the influence of 'scientific' history. In addition, while the Rolls Series ostensibly embraced narrative sources from the whole of Britain and Ireland, its origins and content were very much rooted in the pre-Reformation history of England.⁶⁴ The very act of devoting eight volumes of the series to Gerald can therefore be read as a further instance of literary appropriation. Both John Brewer and James Dimock, the two main editors of Gerald's work for the Rolls Series, were English. The former

⁶¹ George Lillie Craik, *A Compendious History of English Literature and of the English Language from the Norman Conquest, with Numerous Specimens*, I (London, 1861), pp. 86–7; Henry Morley, *English Writers: An Attempt towards a History of English Literature*, III (London, 1888), pp. 65–85.

⁶² William Spalding, *The History of English Literature: With an Outline of the Origin and Growth of the English Language* (New York, 1854), p. 51; Elizabeth Stansbury Kirkland, *A Short History of English Literature for Young People* (Chicago, 1892), p. 22.

⁶³ Charles Knight, *The Popular History of England: An Illustrated History of Society and Government from the Earliest Period to our Own Times* (London, 1864), pp. 277–9.

⁶⁴ M. D. Knowles, 'Presidential address; great historical enterprises IV, the Rolls Series', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 11 (1963), 137–59.

was a Tractarian while the latter was an Anglican clergyman.⁶⁵ Both were therefore products of a decidedly English religious milieu, just like the authors of the 1847 report discussed above, and were thus a long way from the nonconformism that characterized much of Welsh intellectual life in the period. It is telling that, like Knight, Dimock repeated Gerald's views on Welsh failings as fact in the preface to volume six.⁶⁶ Similarly, in the preface to volume one Brewer derided the state of twelfth-century Welsh learning, accentuated Gerald's Norman ancestry, and in that context referred to the 'pure blood of his race [that] ran in full vigour through his veins'.⁶⁷

Presenting Gerald's writings in a context of English literary achievement meant that they could be deployed in support of the Whiggish and Teutonist agendas discussed above. This was exactly what Green and Davis did. Moreover, Whiggism and Teutonism were aspects of a broader adherence to the totem of historical progress in the period. The assumption that societies moved from a state of barbarism to a state of civilization was deeply inculcated in nineteenth-century views of the past, and was frequently used to demonstrate the supposed superiority of nation states in Western Europe.⁶⁸ However, there is also some resonance between the nineteenth-century idea of historical progress, and the notions of social development that were a feature of Gerald's time. These concepts, although actually very different, both assumed that societies should or at least could change for the better as time passed. Gerald illustrated this in the *History and Topography of Ireland*, asserting that 'men usually progress from the woods to the fields, and from the fields to

⁶⁵ David Loades, 'Brewer, John Sherren (1809–1879)', *ODNB*, at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3365?docPos=2>, accessed 20 June 2010; A. F. Pollard, rev. M. C. Curthoys, 'Dimock, James Francis (1810–1876)', *ODNB*, at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7674?docPos=1>, accessed 20 June 2010.

⁶⁶ *Descriptio Kambriae*, pp. xlv–xlvii.

⁶⁷ J. S. Brewer (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I: Invectionum Libellus, Symbolum Electorum* (Rolls Series, 21; London, 1866), pp. ix–xii, quotation at p. x.

⁶⁸ Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan and Kevin Passmore, 'Apologies for the nation state in Western Europe since 1800', in Berger et al. (eds), *Writing National Histories*, pp. 9–10. Again these ideas owed a large debt to the Scottish Enlightenment: see Nicholas Phillipson, 'Language, sociability and history: some reflections on the foundations of Adam Smith's science of man', in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (eds), *Economy, Polity, and Society: British Intellectual History 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 70–2; Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh, 2001), pp. 75–7.

settlements and communities of citizens'.⁶⁹ This statement referred to the Irish rather than the Welsh, and its similarity to nineteenth-century ideas about progress was coincidental. Nevertheless, it does indicate that the conceptual tools needed to see Wales as a society in stagnation, as opposed to a state of dynamic development, existed in both periods. Such ideas could thus provide justifications for cultural imperialism, whether it was religious and behavioural as in the twelfth century or religious, behavioural and linguistic as in the nineteenth.

WELSH HISTORIANS AND NATIONALIST AGENDAS

Given these English attitudes towards Welsh medieval history (and the ideological context that spawned them), Welsh historians in the later part of the nineteenth century were presented with something of a challenge. Wales had never been a unified kingdom and had been increasingly dominated by England from the eleventh century onwards. As such, it was not possible to construct a Whiggish history of Wales along English lines.⁷⁰ In addition, history in Wales had been heavily romanticized by scholars and writers such as Iolo Morganwg (1747–1826), who used vernacular Welsh sources as the basis for an imaginative and sometimes fictional version of Welsh history characterized by heroes and bards. However, Iolo's version of the Welsh past was politically radical, overtly nationalistic and, as became evident in the latter part of the century, critically unsound.⁷¹ It was therefore out-of-step with the more rigorous

⁶⁹ John J. O'Meara (trans.), *History and Topography of Ireland* (Hamondsworth, 1982), pp. 101–2; James F. Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera V: Topographia Hibernica et Expugnatio Hibernica* (Rolls Series, 21; London, 1867), p. 151. It should be noted, however, that the English verb 'progress' has been used as the translation for 'processerit', third person singular future perfect of the Latin verb *procedo*, which is more usually translated as 'proceed' or 'advance'. The Latin original thus lacks the implied value judgement commonly associated in the modern era with 'progress'.

⁷⁰ This issue was exacerbated by a sense that the Edwardian Conquest of 1282 marked the end of Welsh history, as suggested, for example, by the abrupt termination of Lloyd's *History of Wales*: Geraint H. Jenkins, 'Clio and Wales: Welsh remembrancers and historical writing, 1751–2001', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, new series, 8 (2001), 123; Neil Evans, 'The changing context of Welsh historiography 1890–2000', in Brocklehurst and Phillips (eds), *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, pp. 20–1.

⁷¹ Prys Morgan, *Iolo Morganwg* (Cardiff, 1975), pp. 57–74, 76–9; Geraint H. Jenkins, *Facts, Fantasy and Fiction: The Historical Vision of Iolo Morganwg*

methodologies that began to affect Welsh history writing from the 1860s onwards. The inclusion of Gerald's works in the Rolls Series was one symptom of this change, but at the same time Welsh-language sources were also being reclaimed and re-legitimized for critical historians through publication in England.⁷² This can be seen in the fact that the chronicles *Brut y Tywysogyon* and *Annales Cambriae* were published in the Rolls Series in 1860. Yet these sources were edited by John Williams (1811–62), who was a keen disciple of Iolo, a defender of romantic Welsh history and a member of Iolo's bardic order of the Gorsedd.⁷³ Williams, who also used the bardic pseudonym 'Ab Ithel', used the prefaces to his Rolls Series volumes to make frequent reference to bards and the Gorsedd, and even linked medieval and modern practices to a druidic past.⁷⁴ Partly because of this, subsequent historians such as John Edward Lloyd (1861–1947) were strongly critically of these editions for their lack of critical faculty and acceptance of Iolo's bardic tradition.⁷⁵

The romanticism of Iolo also exerted a strong influence over the *History of Wales* (1869) by Jane Williams (1806–85). This was a significant publication in terms of the development of historical method in Wales. Geraint Jenkins refers to it as one of the earliest examples of 'reputable' Welsh history writing while Deidre Beddoe asserts that it 'was not fully superseded until the publication of J. E. Lloyd's *A History of Wales*'.⁷⁶ Yet its author was a member of the Gorsedd who used the bardic pseudonym 'Ysgafell', and had previously published a furious

(Aberystwyth, 1997); Marion Löffler, *The Literary and Historical Legacy of Iolo Morganwg, 1826–1926* (Cardiff, 2007), pp. 130–50.

⁷² Glanmor Williams, 'Local and national history in Wales', in D. Huw Owen (ed.) *Settlement and Society in Wales* (Cardiff, 1989), pp. 8–9.

⁷³ Morgan, *Iolo Morganwg*, pp. 21–2, 77–8; Neil Evans, 'Finding a new story: the search for a usable past in Wales, 1869–1930', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, new series, 10 (2004), 146; Löffler, *Literary and Historical Legacy*, pp. 81–3, 91–4.

⁷⁴ John Williams (ed.), *Brut y Tywysogion; or the Chronicle of the Princes* (Rolls Series, 17; London, 1860), pp. viii–xiv, xviii, xx, xxv, xxvii, xxxviii, xliii–xlvi; idem (ed.), *Annales Cambriae* (Rolls Series, 20; London, 1860), pp. xi–xiv, xvi, xix, xxi.

⁷⁵ J. E. Lloyd, 'Williams, John (1811–1862), Welsh antiquary', *Dictionary of National Biography* (1900), at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/olddnb/29525>, accessed 22 June 2010; Huw Pryce, 'Modern nationality and the medieval past: the Wales of John Edward Lloyd', in R. R. Davies and Geraint H. Jenkins (eds), *From Medieval to Modern Wales: Historical Essays in Honour of Kenneth O. Morgan and Ralph A. Griffiths* (Cardiff, 2004), p. 23.

⁷⁶ Jenkins, 'Clio and Wales', p. 122; Deirdre Beddoe, 'Williams, Jane [Jane

response to the 1847 *Report on Education* in which she staunchly defended Welsh people and culture.⁷⁷ It is therefore unsurprising that her *History* presented a positive view of the medieval Welsh couched in the imagistic and poetic language of romanticism.⁷⁸ Moreover, she made extensive use of the indigenous sources edited by her bardic contemporary John Williams. In a twenty-eight page chapter covering the period 1137 to 1169 she cited *Brut y Tywysogyon* thirty-two times and the *Annales Cambriae* thirty-one times.⁷⁹ Gerald's *Description* was used much less frequently: for the period 1175 to 1193 he was cited on just eight occasions.⁸⁰ When she did discuss Gerald, Williams described him as 'severe', 'rash', 'vain' and with an 'utter ignorance of real piety'.⁸¹ Evidently she saw him in the same way as Green and Davis did later: as part of a canon of English writers hostile to Wales. The difference was that she did not accept the accuracy of Gerald's testimony. Her *History* aimed to rebuff the bias found in the work of contemporary English commentators and exemplified by the 1847 report. However, it was Welsh-language sources, rather than a co-opting of Gerald's writing into a Welsh tradition, which enabled her to fulfil that goal.

Nevertheless, for non-Welsh-speaking intellectual audiences in England and on the Continent, these vernacular texts were still tainted with the fantasies of Iolo and his ilk, the more so because Welsh editors and historians such as John Williams and Jane Williams adhered so openly to his legacy. Moreover, by the late nineteenth century aspirations to nationhood required a critically robust and documentarily sound history.⁸² Gerald's *Description* was consequently a key source for the Welsh historical writers who succeeded the two Williamses. It not only contained a wealth of information and a balanced view of twelfth-century

Williams Ysgafell] (1806–1885)', ODNB, at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29513>, accessed 22 June 2010.

⁷⁷ Beddoe, 'Williams, Jane'; Evans, 'Finding a new story', 146–7. For such a critic of the 1847 report, it is notable that Williams was a Welsh Anglican rather than a nonconformist: Roberts, *Language of the Blue Books*, pp. 211–12; Morgan, 'Long knives', p. 209.

⁷⁸ Löffler, *Literary and Historical Legacy*, pp. 85, 91; Evans, 'Finding a new story', 147; for a discussion of the role of language in romantic history-writing, see Bentley, *Modern Historiography*, pp. 25–8.

⁷⁹ Jane Williams, *A History of Wales* (London, 1869), pp. 234–62.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 271–94.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 272–4.

⁸² Evans, 'Finding a new story', 145; Pryce, 'Modern nationality', pp. 19–20.

Welsh society, but it was also in Latin rather than Welsh and therefore unsullied by mythic romanticism. In this context, the ambiguities that characterized Gerald and the *Description* could be made to serve Welsh rather than English ends.⁸³ This process was aided by the nature of Gerald's later career, in which he became estranged from the English state and sought to have St Davids raised to an archbishopric.⁸⁴ From the perspective of emergent Welsh nationalism, whether cultural or political, Gerald could therefore be easily depicted as an early patriot. Furthermore, Anglican attacks on nonconformism, such as the 1847 report, provided an intellectual environment in which Gerald could be construed as a defender of Welsh religious autonomy. As early as 1824 he was portrayed in great detail as unequivocally Welsh in feeling and language by the London-Welsh antiquary John Parry.⁸⁵ This interpretation of Gerald, which stood in opposition to that of Jane Williams, was cemented in *Gerald the Welshman* (1889), by the Welsh lawyer and antiquary Henry Owen (1844–1914).⁸⁶ Owen's volume firmly established a scholarly tradition of looking at Gerald as both product and representative of Welsh culture and ethnicity. Owen emphasized Gerald's Welsh lineage, and referred to him as a 'Welshman', a 'Welsh student' and a 'Welsh patriot'.⁸⁷ He also painted Gerald's struggle to have St Davids raised to metropolitan status in broad patriotic strokes, highlighting the supposed ancient ecclesiastical independence of the country and stating that Gerald fought 'for the honour of Wales'.⁸⁸ While both the positive and negative attributes of the Welsh found in the *Description* were recounted by Owen, more time was spent on the good points than the bad.⁸⁹ The work ended with a eulogy of 'the figure of the great Welsh Archdeacon [who] stands out across seven centuries, towering above his fellows as he did in actual life'.⁹⁰ For Owen, he was indeed 'Gerald the Welshman'.

⁸³ Bartlett, *Voice of the Middle Ages*, pp. 16–17; Pryce, 'Cross-border career', pp. 51–2.

⁸⁴ Bartlett, 'Gerald of Wales'; Pryce, 'Cross-border career', p. 54.

⁸⁵ John H. Parry, *The Cambrian Plutarch; Comprising Memoirs of Some of the Most Eminent Welshmen, from the Earliest Times to the Present* (London, 1824), pp. 146–72.

⁸⁶ B. G. C[harles], 'Owen, Henry (1844–1919), antiquary', in J. E. Lloyd and R. T. Jenkins (eds), *Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940* (London, 1959), p. 705.

⁸⁷ Henry Owen, *Gerald the Welshman* ([1889] 3rd edn, London, 1914), pp. 1–5.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–11, 16–24, 123–4.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 75–86.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

The attitudes of Henry Owen and Jane Williams represented two extremes in late nineteenth-century views of Gerald and his relationship with Wales. By the beginning of the next century, however, the uses to which Gerald and his *Description* were put by Welsh historians had begun to grow more nuanced. The work of the influential educationalist Owen Morgan Edwards (1858–1920) illustrated this. Edwards was, in the words of Neil Evans, ‘not at the cutting edge of scholarship, not a researcher in the modern sense, but a popularizer and educator’.⁹¹ That meant that his works were read by the educated public as well as the intellectual elite, and he held a key place in the resurgence of Welsh culture at the start of the twentieth century.

Edwards’s book *Wales* (1901) was published as part of the Stories of the Nations series which included countries from across Europe. This showed that the idea of Welsh distinctiveness was becoming increasingly accepted on an international stage, and Edwards was therefore writing in part for an international audience that expected critical source-based history. Here, Gerald’s criticisms of Welsh marriage practices were rejected on the basis that marriage within prohibited degrees was in fact ‘the basis of the whole political system in the Wales of the period’.⁹² On the other hand, the *Description* was used to illustrate the musical and poetic abilities of the Welsh, thus tapping into the same sense of ‘Celtic’ creativity as the English historians discussed above.⁹³ Edwards also devoted a twenty-two-page chapter to Gerald’s 1188 preaching tour, in which he used the *Journey through Wales* to construct a detailed and positive depiction of Welsh life. This chapter included an admiring account of medieval Welsh homes and hospitality based on that found in the *Description*.⁹⁴ Edwards also mentioned Gerald by name no less than forty-nine times.⁹⁵ In defence of Welsh society he stated that the *Description* and *Journey* were ‘full of bitter prejudices’ and that Gerald’s ‘sympathies were not with the Welsh’.⁹⁶ Yet he also praised Gerald’s

⁹¹ Neil Evans, “‘When men and mountains meet’: historians’ explanations of the history of Wales, 1890–1970”, ante, 22 (2004–5), 226.

⁹² Owen M. Edwards, *Wales* (London, 1901), p. 124.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 101–2.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 105–26; the discussion of Welsh hospitality is on pp. 123–4. Gerald’s tour of Wales, on which the *Journey* is based, is also echoed by *Cartrefi Cymru* (1896), Edwards’s own piece of travel writing in which he eulogizes the hospitality and virtues of the Welsh: Hazel Davies, *O. M. Edwards* (Cardiff, 1988), pp. 33–58.

⁹⁵ Edwards refers to Gerald frequently beyond the chapter dealing with his tour of Wales: Edwards, *Wales*, pp. 101–2, 146, 149, 201, 237–8, 283, 317.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 106 and 124.

'descriptions of character – both national and individual' and his 'love for the mysterious and half-pagan superstitions of his countrymen'.⁹⁷ The importance Edwards placed on the *Description* as a source was illustrated by his claim that, when reading it, the 'Wales of the twelfth century appear[s] before us in life-like reality'.⁹⁸ While accepting that Gerald passed many negative judgements on Wales, Edwards was nonetheless able to incorporate his work into a more sympathetic version of Welsh history. This stands in contrast to the uses to which the *Description* was put by Green and Davis, and also its rejection by Williams.

This defence of medieval Wales continued in Edwards's popular *Short History of Wales* (1906), where he argued of Llewelyn ap Gruffudd that

I should not like you to think that Wales was more barbarous than England, or Llywelyn less civilised than Edward I. Giraldus Cambrensis saw a prince going barefoot . . . and many historians, who have never read a line of Welsh poetry, take for granted that the conquest of Wales was a new victory for civilisation.

In many ways Wales was more civilised than England at that time.⁹⁹

Here Edwards challenged the assumptions of English supremacy made by historians such as Green and Davis, and highlighted a direct causal link between those views and the portrayal of the Welsh put forward by Gerald. Moreover, while he was unable to conceptualize Welsh history according to the organizing principle of the state, the quotation shows that he still thought in terms of barbarism and civilization and believed that a society's progress could be measured.¹⁰⁰ He went on to claim that, although Welsh law was less sophisticated than that of England it was in many ways more just.¹⁰¹ In this way he embraced the legalistic preoccupation of English Whiggism but used it to draw different conclusions. In his earlier work *Wales*, meanwhile, he depicted Llywelyn ap Iorwerth as a liberal visionary seeking Welsh independence within wider British unity.¹⁰² Moreover, in the conclusion to that book he emphasized the continuity of Welsh history and likened the Welsh national spirit, which had survived for so long, to

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 106.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 107.

⁹⁹ Owen Edwards, *A Short History of Wales* (London, 1906), pp. 55–6.

¹⁰⁰ Evans, 'Men and mountains', 222–8; Evans, 'Finding a new story', 148–52.

¹⁰¹ Edwards, *Short History*, pp. 56–7.

¹⁰² Edwards, *Wales*, pp. 149–51; Evans, 'Men and mountains', 224.

that which had animated the American Revolution.¹⁰³ This back-projection of present-day ideals on to a historical canvas was a staple of Whig history, and Edwards's work is a useful example of the influence that Whiggish ideas had on the way that Welsh intellectuals constructed the medieval history of their own country at the start of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the Welsh historian Edward Arthur Lewis, writing not long after Edwards, took an even more conventionally Whiggish line by arguing that Norman encroachments and the Edwardian Conquest had revolutionized primitive Wales with feudalism and agricultural and urban development.¹⁰⁵

Edwards, however, took a more balanced approach. With reference to the Edwardian Conquest he asserted that:

It is not right that we Welshmen should feel bitter against England, because, in this last war, Edward won and Llywelyn fell. It is easy to say that Edward was cruel and faithless, and it is easy to say that Llywelyn was shift and obstinate; but it is quite clear that each of them thought that he was right. Edward thought that Britain should be united: Llywelyn thought Wales ought to be free. Now, happily, we have the union and the freedom.¹⁰⁶

This extract encapsulates the middle ground that Edwards walked as what Chris Williams calls a 'unionist nationalist'.¹⁰⁷ Edwards was a respected member of the British establishment. He spent a substantial part of his life in England and Scotland and was educated in and then taught at Oxford. At that time the university was at the forefront of Whig historiography, and it was here that Edwards was exposed to its tenets.¹⁰⁸ He then held a number of positions as an educationalist within the state apparatus, and was knighted in 1916.¹⁰⁹ Yet he is best remembered as a

¹⁰³ Edwards, *Wales*, pp. 403–4.

¹⁰⁴ Evans, 'Men and mountains', 226–7; Jenkins, 'Clio and Wales', 122.

¹⁰⁵ Edward Arthur Lewis, *The Mediaeval Boroughs of Snowdonia: A Study of the Rise and Development of the Municipal Element in the Ancient Principality of North Wales down to the Act of Union of 1536* (London, 1912), pp. 21–2, cited in Pryce, 'Normans in Welsh history', p. 15.

¹⁰⁶ Edwards, *Short History*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁷ Chris Williams, 'Wales's "Unionist nationalist": Sir Thomas Phillips (1801–67)', *Llafur*, 8 (2003), 7–17, cited in Evans, 'Finding a new story', 148–9.

¹⁰⁸ Campbell, *Stubbs and the English State*, p. 3; Burrow, *Liberal Descent*, pp. 97–9.

¹⁰⁹ Davies, *Edwards*, pp. 17, 19–22, 108; Gareth Elwyn Jones, 'Edwards, Sir Owen Morgan (1858–1920)', *ODNB*, at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32984>, accessed 15 July 2009.

champion of Welsh-language education, literature and culture. He used his position as chief inspector for schools in Wales to initiate Welsh-language teaching in every Welsh school, he published and edited many works in Welsh, and he founded several Welsh-language periodicals.¹¹⁰ These activities formed the backdrop to his historical vindication of the Welsh.

Nevertheless, viewed through the traditional Whig lens of historical progress medieval Wales could not compete with England in terms of constitutional development. Nor could Edwards claim parity for Wales with England in terms of economic sophistication. Instead his defence was based on different characteristics. The extract above showed how he used a broader set of criteria, including poetry, to illustrate Welsh progress. Again the stereotype of 'Celtic' creativity reared its head, but in this instance Edwards used it to challenge the notion that constitutional advancement was the only indicator of historical progress. Yet Edwards was no political separatist, as is shown by his career within the British state and the quotation above. His aim in writing both *Wales* and the *Short History* was to champion Welsh culture within the union. His historical writings thus provide an insight into the unionist-nationalist identity that many of the Welsh literati ascribed to at the turn of the century. Edwards saw himself as British as well as Welsh, thus demonstrating Linda Colley's neat adage that identities are not like hats: more than one can be worn at the same time.¹¹¹

Graeme Morton has posited an interpretation of Scottish intellectual life in the nineteenth century that can be applied to Edwards. Morton suggests that the literati of Scotland were able to opt into a kind of civic nationalism within the union as a result of the metaphorical 'space' between the British state and Scottish civic society.¹¹² This theory also seems applicable to unionist-nationalism in early twentieth-century Wales, and Edwards provides an excellent example of it.¹¹³ The

¹¹⁰ Davies, *Edwards*, pp. 35–58, 101–4.

¹¹¹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (London, 1992), p. 6.

¹¹² During the early part of the century at least, the state interfered relatively rarely in Scottish religious, legal and educational issues: Graeme Morton, 'What if? The significance of Scotland's missing nationalism in the nineteenth century', in Dauvit Broun, R. J. Finlay and Michael Lynch (eds), *Image and Identity: The Making and Re-making of Scotland through the Ages* (Glasgow, 1998), pp. 157–76.

¹¹³ The 'Celtic' scholar John Rhys (1840–1915) is another example. Like Edwards, he was Oxford-educated, held various state positions and was knighted, yet was a notable champion of Welsh language and culture: John Fraser, rev. Mari A.

apparently amicable combination of state-sponsored employment and championing Welsh language and culture certainly suggests that official attitudes towards Wales were less overbearing than they had been when the 1847 report was published. Moreover, Edwards was a Methodist writing for a largely nonconformist intelligentsia that was in the ascendance in Wales.¹¹⁴ This again demonstrates how much official attitudes towards non-Anglican Protestantism had changed since 1847.¹¹⁵ Nonconformist advocates of Welsh culture like Edwards could thus also exist as representatives of the establishment in a way that would not have been possible fifty years earlier. Edwards's more balanced use of Gerald demonstrated this change, especially when set against the ways in which the *Description* was used by Green, Davis and also Jane Williams. Moreover, a certain synchronicity existed between the 'cross-border careers' of Edwards and Gerald. Both men were located in an ill-defined territory between a vibrant Welsh society and a powerful English state. This resonance helped Edwards to use Gerald's writings to construct a history of Wales that was culturally nationalist but politically unionist.

John Edward Lloyd took Gerald and the *Description* even further from the interpretations advanced by Green and Davis. His *History of Wales* (1911) was a significant milestone in the development of Welsh history writing and his methodology was very different from that of Edwards, who did not engage with historical evidence in any detail. Lloyd's *History* represented the fulfilment in Wales of the nineteenth-century European movement towards analytical and source-based national history writing. Although he did not use much archive material, he based his work on a very wide range of printed sources which he evaluated critically.¹¹⁶ His work represented a seminal moment in Welsh historical scholarship and set a new standard of rigour and scholarship.¹¹⁷ The ways in which he

Williams, 'Rhys, Sir John (1840–1915)', *ODNB*, at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35734?docPos=1>, accessed 15 July 2009.

¹¹⁴ Evans, 'Finding a new story', 150–2; Davies, *Edwards*, pp. 3–4, 8–9.

¹¹⁵ This was in part because Wales's intelligentsia had, over the intervening fifty years, quietly accepted many of the social criticisms of Welsh life levelled by the 1847 report and worked to address them through devout non-conformism and cultural resurgence: Morgan, 'Long knives', p. 210.

¹¹⁶ Pryce, 'Modern nationality', pp. 23–4; Evans, 'Finding a new story', 159–60; Evans, 'Men and mountains', 235.

¹¹⁷ Pryce, 'Modern nationality', p. 15; Evans, 'Men and mountains', 228–9; Carr, *Medieval Wales*, p. 13. Lloyd's *History* was lauded by the press for its critical and source-based approach: Evans, 'Finding a new story', 156–9.

uses Gerald's *Description* consequently reveal a great deal about the shape of Welsh historiography in the early twentieth century. Like Edwards, Lloyd devoted a significant amount of space to Gerald.¹¹⁸ His nine-page biography made it clear that he did not accept the view, put forward from different angles by both Green and Jane Williams, that Gerald was an English writer. Instead he stated of Gerald's Welsh ancestry that, 'what is remarkable is that from the first he made the utmost of this connection, never failing to emphasise his Welsh descent, regarding Wales as his beloved fatherland, and posing as a Welsh patriotic leader'.¹¹⁹ This was very much in line with the interpretation put forward by Owen some two decades earlier, and represented the unequivocal co-opting of Gerald into a Welsh intellectual tradition. Lloyd also described Gerald as 'one of the most lovable men of his age' and praised the *Description* as having, compared with the *Itinerary*, 'a broader and more philosophical outlook, a completer survey, taken from the Olympian heights of a scholar's lofty seclusion'.¹²⁰

It is therefore not surprising that Lloyd's portrayal of the twelfth-century Welsh owed a great deal to Gerald and the *Description*, as the passage below illustrates:

The Welsh had the merits and the faults of a strenuous, impulsive, quick-witted and eager race. They roamed their hills barefoot and thinly clad, slept in their day clothes on the hardest of couches, and never bemoaned the loss of a dinner. Norman luxury was not allowed to corrupt the Spartan simplicity of their daily life. Nor had they any touch of the servility of the English; from the highest to the lowest, they were unabashed in the presence of the great, and spoke their minds with delightful frankness of utterance. They were firm in friendship, but implacable as foes. When their ire was roused they spilt blood like water, and shrank from no danger to themselves in the effort to avenge an injury or win a point in the great game of war. Oaths and promises were lightly broken; the keenly felt present wrong overshadowed and dwarfed the past engagement. Yet it was only as representing the survival of tribal custom and morality that Welsh life could be termed barbarous. In intellectual ability and mental culture the race stood high . . .¹²¹

¹¹⁸ John Edward Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, II (London, 1911), pp. 555–64.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 555, 564.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 610–11.

Gerald was referred to throughout the section from which this extract is taken, and both the praise and the criticism given here echo those found in the *Description*. Indeed, it was Gerald who noted, without disapproval, that the Welsh went barefoot for most of the time.¹²² The *Description* was also a much-used source throughout Lloyd's discussion of 'Welsh society in 1200'.¹²³ However, it is significant that Lloyd emphasized the positive aspects of that account, such as the hardiness, frankness, friendliness and intelligence of the Welsh, whereas Green and Davis preferred to highlight the negatives. In addition, the use of the term 'Spartan' in the quotation above imbued the medieval Welsh with connotations of wholesome simplicity and prowess in battle, and associated them with the Ancient Greek culture that was seen as the fountainhead of European civilization.¹²⁴ This reference is all the more striking when contrasted with Davis's description of the Welsh as 'oriental'.

However, Lloyd did agree with his English forbears and contemporaries about the pastoral nature of Welsh life:

Little communities might gather around the leading monasteries and royal strongholds, but of true urban life there was none in the districts under native rule; the Welshman's interests were entirely rural, while the country meant for him no rich succession of smiling, well-tilled fields, but Nature's profusion of rock, glen, moor, copse, lake, and meadow, in the midst of which he lived the blithe and careless life of the hunter, the fisher, and the herdsman.¹²⁵

The basis for this statement was again the *Description*, which was referenced earlier on the same page. Here, Lloyd did not dispute the accusation of pastoralism but instead re-cast it in positive terms by invoking the motif of the noble savage. This idealization of 'primitive' societies was in the eighteenth and nineteenth century a common means of reproaching the perceived corruption and moral bankruptcy of modern European life. It was also frequently used to romanticize 'Celtic'

¹²² *Description*, pp. 233–5; *Descriptio Kambriae*, pp. 179–82.

¹²³ Lloyd, *History of Wales*, II, pp. 604–11.

¹²⁴ The prevailing discourse in this period portrayed Spartan society in a fairly negative light in comparison to Athens, but Lloyd used the analogy in a positive sense: Elizabeth Rawson, *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 360–4.

¹²⁵ Lloyd, *History of Wales*, II, p. 606.

societies, both past and present.¹²⁶ Lloyd and also Edwards had, like Davis and Green, been educated in Classics at Oxford. The idea of the classical barbarian would therefore have been familiar to all of them, and pastoral lifestyles were a mainstay of that stereotype.¹²⁷ However, by viewing the Welsh through the lens of romanticism Lloyd was able to present that barbarism not as a negative attribute, but rather as symptomatic of a pre-industrial existence whose simplicity was its attraction. This applied a romantic sheen to the Welsh Middle Ages that resonated, albeit in restrained form, with the myths advanced by Iolo in the early decades of the century.¹²⁸ Furthermore, the prominence that Lloyd gave to Welsh frankness and lack of subservience can be seen as a reined-in version of Iolo's insistence that Wales's ancient druids and bards had been champions of liberty.¹²⁹ At Oxford Lloyd had attended lectures delivered by the influential art critic and social commentator John Ruskin (1819–1900).¹³⁰ Ruskin was an admirer of the Middle Ages, contrasting it with what he saw as the ills of the modern age, and reading the past in terms of regrettable decline from an original state of happy savagery.¹³¹ The examples above show that this ideology had an impact on Lloyd; indeed he saw the preservation of this pastoral life in the modern period as partly responsible for the survival of Welsh national spirit.¹³²

¹²⁶ For example, Matthew Arnold's work on Celtic literature, mentioned earlier in this article, and also the writings of Iolo Morganwg: Chapman, *Celts*, pp. 120–45; Pittock, *Celtic Identity*, pp. 36–44; Morgan, *Iolo Morganwg*, pp. 68–9, 73–4.

¹²⁷ In classical texts discussing Britain, the idea of the pastoral barbarian was focused particularly on Ireland and Scotland. However, twelfth-century writers also applied it to Wales: J. F. Killeen, 'Ireland in the Greek and Roman writers', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 76 (1976), 207–15; D. Scully, 'At world's end: Scotland and Ireland in the Graeco-Roman imagination', in E. Longley, E. Hughes and D. O'Rawe (eds), *Ireland (Ulster) Scotland: Concepts, Contexts, Comparisons* (Belfast, 2003), pp. 164–70.

¹²⁸ Lloyd certainly made extensive use of romantic metaphor and imagery in his historical writing: Evans, 'Finding a new story', 153–5.

¹²⁹ The idea of the Welsh struggle for liberty was central to both Iolo's and Lloyd's interpretations of the medieval period: Jenkins, *Facts, Fantasy and Fiction*, pp. 11–14; Pryce, 'Modern nationality', p. 28.

¹³⁰ Pryce, 'Modern nationality', p. 16.

¹³¹ Robert Hewison, 'Ruskin, John (1819–1900)', *ODNB*, at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24291>, accessed 20 June 2009.

¹³² Pryce, 'Modern nationality', pp. 27–8.

Nevertheless, Lloyd's interpretations of the Welsh medieval past were infused with Whiggish assumptions and romantic savagery could provide the basis for only a limited rehabilitation of it. Like Green, Davis and Edwards, Lloyd had at Oxford been exposed to some of the leading historians of the Whiggish 'Oxford school'.¹³³ Partly as a result of this, he was a staunch adherent of accepted ideas about ethnicity and historical progress, and was also influenced by the new idea of social Darwinism.¹³⁴ This meant that, while romanticism could to an extent mitigate the barbarism of the Welsh Middle Ages, in Lloyd's progressive and teleological view of history the past had to be worse than the present. Yet as well as being a Whig historian, Lloyd was also a cultural and even a political nationalist, albeit while accepting the overarching frameworks of union and empire. He was committed to the foundation of national institutions in Wales, was a member of the Welsh Language Society, and wrote three bilingual history textbooks for use in schools. He was also a member of Cymru Fydd, a nationalistically minded wing of the Liberal Party in Wales.¹³⁵ Moreover, at Oxford he had been influenced by John Rhys, another eminent Welsh scholar and leader in the resurgence of Welsh culture.¹³⁶ It was, therefore, to these ends that he subverted Whig ideas by keeping the idea of progress but building it around the nation, expressed through the collective characteristics of the people, rather than the state.¹³⁷ That meant a greater focus on the creative attributes of the Welsh, which both Green and Edwards had picked out from Gerald's *Description*, and which fitted with the assumptions about 'Celtic' character mentioned above. Indeed, Evans states that, for Lloyd, 'pastoralism [did not] encourage the growth of sophisticated institutions, [but] it did provide the leisure for poetry and song'.¹³⁸ To put it another

¹³³ These Oxford historians included Edward Augustus Freeman and William Stubbs: R. R. Davies, 'Lloyd, Sir John Edward (1861–1947)', *ODNB*, at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34568>, accessed 8 May 2009; Pryce, 'Normans in Welsh history', pp. 12–13; Pryce, 'Modern nationality', pp. 16, 18, 23.

¹³⁴ Jenkins, 'Clio and Wales', 122; Evans, 'Men and mountains', 232–4; Evans, 'Welsh historiography', 20–1; Evans, 'Finding a new story', 153; Pryce, 'Normans in Welsh history', pp. 15–16; Pryce, 'Modern nationality', pp. 25–7.

¹³⁵ Evans, 'Men and mountains', 236–7; Evans, 'Finding a new story', 152–3, 155–6; Pryce, 'Modern nationality', pp. 15–20; Davies, 'Lloyd'.

¹³⁶ Pryce, 'Modern nationality', p. 24.

¹³⁷ Evans, 'Men and mountains', 234; Evans, 'Finding a new story', 153–6; Pryce, 'Normans in Welsh history', pp. 12–15; Pryce, 'Modern nationality', pp. 20–1.

¹³⁸ Evans, 'Men and mountains', 231.

way, a failure to progress in one area resulted in greater achievement in another. Moreover, Whig orthodoxy shone through in Lloyd's work in other ways. His *History* still focused to a large extent on politics and great men, and his admission in the passage above that the survival of 'tribal custom' was a 'barbarous' characteristic of the twelfth-century Welsh demonstrated the extent to which he thought in traditionally constitutional Whiggish terms.¹³⁹

Lloyd's *History* was thus an attempt to show how Welsh national sentiment in the Middle Ages had developed, matured and re-emerged in his own day. Yet he had received a traditional Oxford education and in 1934 accepted a knighthood. In this way he was conceptually located between Wales and England in a very similar manner to his contemporary Edwards, and also his predecessor Gerald. It was this position that gave him access to the ideological apparatus of Whiggism and the methodological tools of critical history, but allowed him to put them to use in support of Welsh cultural legitimacy and political independence within the union. This combination meant that Lloyd's depiction of the Welsh in the twelfth century echoed that of Gerald. Both men perceived both good points and bad in the medieval Welsh, praising what they saw as a kind of happy savagery but denigrating their political instability. In addition, in the first of the two quotations given above Lloyd referred to Welsh morality in the twelfth century as 'barbarous', demonstrating that he also accepted Gerald's criticisms of Welsh sexual habits and marriage practices.

The assumptions that shaped Lloyd's portrayal of the medieval Welsh were in some ways similar to those that Rees Davies divines in the twelfth century. Davies argues that the Welsh 'were weighed in the balance of European norms . . . and were found to be hopelessly wanting'. He then states that 'some of their virtues attracted the praise that is often directed towards the noble savage and the values of "primitive" societies'.¹⁴⁰ Tellingly, Davies's assessment seems as relevant to Lloyd's interpretation as it does to Gerald's. These two sets of characteristics can also be seen in the work of Edwards, Green and Davis, albeit in widely differing proportions. In both periods admiration for a simpler form of life was combined with an assumption of progress which, paradoxically, derided that lifestyle.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 229–30; Pryce, 'Modern nationality', p. 21.

¹⁴⁰ Davies, *Domination and Conquest*, p. 21.

CONCLUSIONS

The *Description of Wales* by Gerald of Wales was central to the depictions of the medieval Welsh put forward by English and Welsh historians between c.1860 and 1910. As a result of Gerald's ambiguous national identity and his text's balanced appraisal of the Welsh, the uses to which historians put the *Description* reflected the ideological contexts in which they operated. Green and Davis acknowledged Gerald's Welsh links but nonetheless appropriated him on behalf of an English intellectual tradition and applied his work to the construction of a pejorative stereotype based on comparisons with England. In so doing they emphasized the criticisms which sprang from Gerald's reform values and cultural context, and linked them to Whiggish assumptions about the historical primacy of England. Initially, Welsh historians like Jane Williams accepted this view and looked to native sources for rebuttal. However, the development of culturally and politically nationalist conceptualizations of the Welsh past towards the end of the nineteenth century caused a shift in the way that Gerald and the *Description* were used. Edwards presented a moderate view of Gerald which nevertheless placed a new emphasis on his Welshness and suggested alternative ways of measuring historical progress. Lloyd, meanwhile, built on the work of Owen by appropriating Gerald's work more fully into a Welsh historiographical tradition and changing the terms by which the portrayal of Welsh society in the *Description* was to be judged. This allowed him to subvert Whiggish ideas about progress and use them to construct a narrative of Welsh nationhood, rather than a story of political failure. The fact that he was able to do so in a work that was also lauded for its rigorous use of sources shows how much the political and intellectual climate in Wales had changed since the 1847 report. Indeed, this point is pushed home by the fact that Lloyd was a nonconformist and a supporter of Anglican disestablishment, a cause which had been anathema to the establishment in 1847.¹⁴¹

With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to see how interpretations of the *Description* by leading historians were loaded according to their outlooks and agenda. This is despite the fact that the late nineteenth century is often seen as the birthplace of modern historical method. It is therefore worth considering the uses to which this source is put in the

¹⁴¹ Pryce, 'Modern nationality', pp. 16–17.

present day. Historians should be wary of placing too much faith in their own objectivity when using the *Description* or any other source. It is likely that future scholars will be able to discern the worldviews and biases that shape twenty-first-century views of Gerald, just as this article has discerned them in the historiography of a previous age.

RICHARD MARSDEN

The Open University in Wales